



## **New Mexico Success Story**

Yashoda Naidoo, President and Founder  
Annapurna's World Vegetarian Café  
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“The place for healing cuisine” Yashoda Naidoo opened the first location of Annapurna Ayurvedic Cuisine and Chai House on January 17, 2002. Annapurna (AP) is one of only two exclusively vegetarian restaurant businesses in the State of New Mexico and is in its 7<sup>th</sup> year of business in Albuquerque and its 4<sup>th</sup> year in Santa Fe. She has been planning the opening of a third location for her restaurant. This was a reality on July 6, 2009 with the opening of her third restaurant location in the Village of Ranchos de Albuquerque.

Prior to opening Annapurna, Ms. Naidoo was a successful CPA working for several Top 5 accounting firms in South Africa, Australia, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. After leaving her accounting position, she ran a small catering business for over a year, while planning the restaurant venture. She had no previous restaurant experience of any kind. In the year prior to opening the restaurant, Ms. Naidoo faced challenging personal setbacks, yet she persevered with her plan for Annapurna.

Ms. Naidoo’s Hindu lineage created in her a deep desire to heal people, and her vision has always been to serve food that is healthy and natural. She originally planned to be a physician; however, her traditional East Indian family would not allow that at the time she entered college, and pushed her into accounting. Although Ms. Naidoo tired of that work over the years, it was somewhat fortuitous, since it gave her a solid business perspective to support her entrepreneurial vision. She is extremely customer oriented, and states her purpose as “educating, supporting, and motivating the customer to heal and pursue wellness from good food.” Annapurna loyal customers will attest that it nourishes the body, mind, and soul. To support her purpose of educating and motivating the customer, Yashoda launched Annapurna’s school of Ayurvedic Cooking in the summer of 2007.

Yashoda is an excellent entrepreneur, and is a strong learner. She is excelling in an industry in which she had no previous experience, and freely shares her learning with others who seek her advice about opening their own businesses. Each location she opens demonstrates the learning she gained from previous openings, as is evidenced by a smoother opening, and a more efficient operation in each new location. She has developed strong coaching skills, and provides an excellent role model for the young men and women who work for her in all three locations. Yashoda is highly supportive of the educational aspirations of her staff, and strongly encourages them to enroll in higher education programs and often helps them think through their career choices. She consistently challenges her staff by setting very high standards, and putting them in positions where they have the opportunity to gain new skills and develop higher

confidence levels. Having a location in Santa Fe has demanded expertise beyond availability in that area. Yashoda undertook the task to train a female chef in the complex area of Ayurvedic cooking and has empowered this young woman to the position of Kitchen Manager in the Santa Fe store. Ms. Naidoo has overcome significant obstacles to pursue her vision, and subsequently blossom as an entrepreneur who serves as a strong role model for others. She is extremely focused and intensely dedicated to growing her business and educating people about the importance of healthy food as an integral part of their lives. Despite the fact that she works long hours, she is also always willing to help others by coaching them on their own business ventures, or in numerous other ways.

Annapurna serves many dishes based on an Ayurvedic philosophy (a 5000 year old medical science from India). Based on Ayurvedic principles, all food is prepared fresh daily, and no leftover food is ever served at the restaurant. Ayurvedic cooking shuns most mainstream vices, including meat, white sugar, alcohol, eggs, iced or carbonated drinks, and canned or frozen vegetables. It prescribes fresh, organic and easy-to-digest foods. The combinations of foods and spices are soothing to the body as well as the mind. This is a very different approach from most restaurants, and the enthusiastic customers of Annapurna consistently tell friends and colleagues about their dining experiences, so that word-of-mouth advertising has become the reason most frequently cited by new customers for coming into the restaurant. Yashoda continues to uphold these principles, as it is important to achieve her vision of being “the place for healing cuisine”. Annapurna has been part of the “green initiative” since the first day of operations, making it a business that has been caring for the body as well as the planet. Ms Naidoo’s initiative in dealing with alternatives taking into account allergies and major diseases continues to keep her innovation strong on a daily basis.

Annapurna also uses alternative grain flours in many of its menu items, providing a much-needed alternative for people with wheat allergies and celiac disease. The breads in this alternative restaurant are yeast free to accommodate women with candida issues. In the same manner the dishes are meticulously kept free of nightshade vegetables to accommodate people with rheumatoid arthritis.

“We frequently hear from customers that our restaurant is one of the few places they can eat out and get nourishing, healthy food that is prepared fresh and fits into the narrow spectrum of foods that are safe for them,” states Yashoda. “The meticulous functioning of the restaurant kitchen has been extended to the cooking school to continue to educate the public on good health through food,” continues Yashoda.

In addition, Ms. Naidoo is committed to the use of organic vegetables and other whole food products, and purchases as many products as possible from NM growers and suppliers, keeping her investment in the local community. Annapurna is frequently approached to furnish food for community events. Ms. Naidoo always willingly provides food, for such events, because it is one way she can put health back into the community. Annapurna also frequently furnishes gift certificates that are used for raffle drawings or other giveaways for local and community organizations.

In addition, Yashoda is one of nineteen small business owners that participated in the 2008 SBA's Emerging 200 Training Initiative. The SBA Emerging 200 initiative enables the participating small business to engage in an intensive customized curriculum focused on developing a winning, expansion strategy for their business, including options for capital access and contracting. This was an intensive 12-week session program. Each session consisted of three hours of training on specific small business topics. Yashoda applied for the SBA E200 Training Initial Program with much skepticism as to a time commitment because she "clearly already does too much as a small business owner." However, Yashoda claims this decision was one of her best in this time of economic uncertainty and changing circumstances for business as a whole. Participating in E200 is an achievement for Yashoda and her company in that she indicates that she had chance to see how important it is to work on her business as opposed to working in her business and continuing to do too much. Yashoda states, "The [E200] program is also enriching my abilities to work with my employees to empower them to help me overcome obstacles in the business on a day to day basis." In spite of the economic uncertainty, Yashoda's business is continuing to grow. To embrace this growth Yashoda is focusing on strategies to take her company to the next level. "In my business, I was trapped in day to day details and the program definitely helped me focus on the end result" Yashoda states.

Since opening her business Yashoda has accomplished numerous goals and has received formal recognition of some of her achievements. Even with a rough beginning, Annapurna earned recognition in its first year with a 3 ½ star rating for 2002 – *Albuquerque Journal* named her restaurant as one of the top 10 restaurants for 2002. Additional awards and recognition include: 2003, Phoenix Award, sponsored by New York Life, an award to a new business that has overcome significant obstacles; 2003, PNM/ WESST Corp Rising Star Award; Named Best Vegetarian – *Crosswinds Weekly* – 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005; Named Best Vegetarian – *Alibi*; 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Named Best Vegetarian – *Daily Lobo*; 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Named Best Vegetarian – *Local IQ*; Best of the City and Best healthy Dining – *Albuquerque, The Magazine*; Best of Santa Fe – *Santa Fe Reporter* – 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Taste of Santa Fe – 2005 and, Top 50 Women Owned Businesses – *New Mexico Business Weekly* – 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008. In addition, Annapurna and Yashoda have been profiled by the *New Mexico Business Weekly* (Business Strategy), *Albuquerque, The Magazine* (Chef's Profile and Women in Business Profile) and was nominated for Restaurateur of the Year Nominee 2005 by the New Mexico Restaurant Association.

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